

in the White House Tribal Nations Conference. President Barack Obama has committed to placing American Indian issues at the center of his administration, and the multiday conference was an important testament to the President's pledge to involve American Indian people in constructive dialogue. The conference allowed leaders from the 564 federally recognized tribes to interact directly with the President and representatives from the highest levels of the administration. The tribal leaders in attendance displayed the very diverse face of Indian Country. Each individual tribe forms a distinctive chapter of the American Indian story, yet the narrative contains many common themes of triumph and tragedy.

President Bill Clinton hosted the first tribal nations conference at the White House in 1994. It is not without precedent that President Obama invited leaders from all federally recognized tribes; however, I believe that this year's event is unmatched in its potential for progress. President Obama has charged each Cabinet agency with delivering a detailed plan of how to improve tribal consultation and how to address the complex challenges facing Indian Country. This Congress, with the leadership of President Obama, has an exceptional opportunity to improve the quality of life for American Indian tribes by consulting with tribal leaders and focusing on tribal sovereignty and the empowerment of Indian communities. For far too long, American Indians have endured a drastically underfunded health care system, crumbling education facilities, dismal economic prospects, and a subpar standard of living. It is essential to address this erosive cycle of poverty and marginalization in a thoughtful manner.

The diversity of American Indian tribes reflects the vibrant origins of our Nation. As the First Americans, sound American Indian policy is a precursor to our Nation's capacity to evolve and progress in an ever changing, diversifying society. We need to celebrate the proud ancestry and incredible sacrifices of American Indians. National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month reminds us to promote diversity rather than suppress it, as diverse values and cultures erect the foundation of the United States.

American Indians contributed to the formation of modern political institutions as tribal confederacies influenced the foundations of early American democracy. In every conflict since the Revolutionary War, tribal members have courageously sacrificed their lives to help defend and preserve these democratic ideals. As the Federal Government works to assert a modern environmental ethic that can address climate change and natural resource scarcity, we have much to learn from American Indian communities. The environmental consciousness inherent in tribal culture promotes conservation

and sustainability. American Indian communities have demonstrated that society can thrive and prosper without destroying the natural environment.

I hope this month provides students with the opportunity to explore the Thanksgiving story from the American Indian point of view. Observance of National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month reaffirms this Nation's respect for American Indian people. I encourage everyone to participate in our celebration of American Indians. I would like to pay tribute to the more than 65,000 American Indians in South Dakota whose heritage enriches our communities. While the month of November serves as an important testament to American Indian culture, it is critical to make a daily commitment to advancing the quality of life of American Indians, in order for our Nation to walk forward with strength and purpose.

NATIONAL SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE DAY

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize Saturday, November 21, as National Survivors of Suicide Day. National Survivors of Suicide Day is a day of healing for those who have lost someone to suicide. In 1999, a Senate resolution created this annual event behind the efforts of Senator HARRY REID, who lost his father to suicide. This year, on November 21, over 230 conferences will take place internationally to allow survivors of suicide to connect with others who have experienced the tragedy of suicide loss.

The statistics about suicide are deeply concerning. In our Nation, suicide is the eleventh leading cause of death for all ages. Among young adults ages 15–24, there are approximately 100–200 attempts for every completed suicide. Suicide takes the lives of approximately 30,000 Americans each year, and a person dies by suicide about every 16 minutes. Suicide is an epidemic that tears families and communities apart, and we must do all that we can to prevent it.

A suicide survivor is an individual who has lost someone to suicide. It is estimated that for each suicide, seven other lives are altered forever because of the death. Every year, approximately 200,000 people become survivors due to this tragic loss of life. Many suicide survivors are left devastated, confused and weakened by their loss. Friends and family often experience depression, guilt, shock and anger. Unfortunately, there remains a stigma surrounding suicide and mental illness, and victims often shoulder some of the blame.

South Dakota is among a group of Western States that consistently has a higher rate of suicide than the rest of the country. The suicide rate for American Indians ages 15–34 is more than two times higher than the national average and is the second leading cause of death for this age group. The loss of

these young people is a real crisis. We must provide tribes with the resources they need to implement culturally sensitive suicide prevention programs. It is critical to strengthen the social fabric to help improve mental health. On American Indian reservations in South Dakota, I have seen the catastrophic ripple effect that one suicide can have. Given the alarming occurrence of "suicide clusters" and imitative deaths that have occurred in Indian Country this year, it is imperative to provide support for those left behind.

I hope that National Suicide Survivors Day is an opportunity to promote the broad based support that each survivor deserves. We are not doing enough to fight this tragic epidemic that is taking the lives of so many in our communities. We must concentrate our efforts on addressing the root causes of suicide in Indian Country and throughout the Nation. It is critical to expand access to mental health services, including a focus on education, prevention and intervention. Furthermore, we need to acknowledge the obstacles that suicide survivors face during their grieving and encourage the involvement of survivors in healing activities and prevention programs. This is one of the goals of the South Dakota Strategy for Suicide Prevention. Finally, I believe that with appropriate support and treatment, suicide survivors can lead effective advocacy efforts to eliminate stigma and reduce the incidence of suicide.

AMERICAN DIABETES MONTH

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I wish today to recognize November as American Diabetes Month. National studies estimate 23.6 million Americans live with diabetes, and nearly one-quarter of this population has not yet been diagnosed. The number of South Dakotans living with diabetes has doubled since 1998, with more than 39,000 adults diagnosed as diabetics in 2008 and an estimated 10,000 not yet diagnosed.

American Diabetes Month focuses on increasing awareness of the disease, strengthening prevention efforts, and identifying associated health risks. The disease carries with it an increased rate of heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, kidney disease, blindness, and amputation of the lower extremities, among other associated health problems. For the past few decades, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has steadily increased nationwide, increasing the prevalence of type 2 diabetes. As the prevalence of diabetes increases, we are beginning to understand the costs to both our citizens' health and to our economy. The high costs to our government in direct medical and indirect costs of lost productivity, coupled with the personal costs of rising health care coverage and treatment, make type 2 diabetes control and prevention a national priority.

Throughout my career, I have strongly supported initiatives to advance diabetes research, prevention, and education efforts. I commend the work conducted at the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to explore cures and treatments for type 1 and type 2 diabetes and prevent the development of type 2 diabetes.

Americans diagnosed with diabetes, whether insured or not, often face significant barriers in receiving timely, affordable treatment in our current health care system. Congress is currently considering comprehensive reform of our Nation's health care system. This is a historic opportunity to improve access to quality, affordable health care for all Americans and better manage the treatment of chronic diseases. Given the cost of diabetes to our citizens' health and personal finances and to our national economy, we must also continue to push to increase funding for diabetes research and prevention programs. American Diabetes Month provides an opportunity to learn more about the causes and health risks of diabetes and recognize its impact on our Nation and our families.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

REMEMBERING SERGEANT WINFIELD THOMPSON SR.

• Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I wish today to recognize the life of SGT Winfield Thompson Sr., an honored member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate. When this war hero and South Dakota native passed away November 6, 2009, our State lost a respected tribal member and a wonderful citizen who served as an inspiration to us all.

After entering the U.S. Army in April 1941, SGT Winfield Thompson Sr. was captured by Japanese forces in the Philippines on April 9, 1942. He was forced to march 90 miles over rough terrain with little food and water along with thousands of captured soldiers in what is today known as the Bataan Death March. After his capture, Sergeant Thompson was held at various prison camps and suffered horrible conditions until he was finally liberated in September 1945. Upon his rescue, he stood at attention, saluted, and said, "Sergeant Thompson reporting to duty, Sir." During Sergeant Thompson's extraordinary military career, he was awarded the Prisoner of War Medal, American Defense Service ribbon with Bronze Star, Victory Medal, Asiatic Pacific Theater Ribbon with three bronze battle stars, Philippine Defense Ribbon, eight Overseas Service Bars, one Service Stripe and the Good Conduct Medal.

After his honorable discharge from the U.S. Army in May 1946, Sergeant Thompson returned home and married

Virginia Redday. Winfield and Virginia were blessed with 7 children, 16 grandchildren, and 29 great-grandchildren. Winfield was preceded in death by his wife.

SGT Winfield Thompson Sr. embodied South Dakota values with his unwavering devotion to family and country, and I extend my deepest sympathies to his family on the loss of this great man. •

TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM J. ROGERS

• Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I wish today to extol the enormous legacy of selfless service, contribution, and, above all, patriotism of an extraordinary Mainer and American, William J. Rogers, and to recognize with the highest esteem the American Legion Post in Auburn, ME, founded by Bill and his fellow veterans, which will be appropriately named the "William J. Rogers American Legion Post 153" in his honor on November 29, 2009. This fitting accolade pays tribute to an individual who devoted his life to serving and defending our country, as well as tirelessly advocating for those who placed their lives in harm's way on our behalf—our courageous veterans.

Bill was one of the great sons of my hometown of Auburn, ME, where my roots run deep. In fact, on a personal note, I am proud to say we both graduated from the same high school, Edward Little. As fate would have it, years later, I enjoyed the pleasure of having Bill and his lovely wife, Connie, as wonderful neighbors of mine on Nottingham Road.

As a young man, Bill answered his country's call to serve during World War II and joined the U.S. Navy, training to be a pilot at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill along with Boston Red Sox legends, Ted Williams and Johnny Pesky Bill's roommate. As a naval aviator, Bill fought heroically and was awarded the Air Medal and Presidential Unit Citation for his wartime service, having deployed to fight in the Pacific, where he valiantly flew F6F Hellcats and Lockheed Venturas.

While Bill departed from active military service in 1946, his commitment to veterans and a lifetime of advocacy on their behalf was just beginning. Bill was a founding member of American Legion Post 153 in Auburn, where he held several offices at both the local and State levels including adjutant, vice commander, and department commander. On the national level, Bill became Maine's national executive committeeman, a member of the liaison committee to the National Public Relations Commission, and from 1965 to 1966 national vice commander. In 1976, Bill received the tremendous distinction of being elected national commander of the American Legion, the first national commander from the State of Maine—and we could not have been more proud.

Traveling more than 300,000 miles throughout the world in all 50 States

and 17 countries, Bill was the voice of Legionnaires and veterans, meeting with leaders such as President Ford and President Carter. Maine and our Nation could not have had a better champion for the American Legion and our brave and noble veterans than Bill Rogers.

Throughout his life, in word and deed, Bill placed service above self and country above self-interest. He held sacred our country's obligation to stand by those who have stood by us, and I cannot imagine a more perfect testament to this outstanding Mainer and American who placed such a high premium on contributing to our Nation than to name Auburn's American Legion Post after him. •

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mrs. Neiman, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 10:40 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, without amendment:

S. 1599. An act to amend title 36, United States Code, to include in the Federal charter of the Reserve Officers Association leadership positions newly added in its constitution and bylaws.

S. 1860. An act to permit each current member of the Board of Directors of the Office of Compliance to serve for 3 terms.

The message also announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 1834. An act to amend the Small Business Act to expand and improve the assistance provided to Indian tribe members, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, and for other purposes.

H.R. 2781. An act to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate segments of the Molalla River in Oregon, as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and for other purposes.

H.R. 3961. An act to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to reform the Medicare SGR payment system for physicians and to reinstitute and update the Pay-As-You-Go requirement of budget neutrality on new tax and mandatory spending legislation, enforced by the threat of annual, automatic sequestration.

The message further announced that the House has agreed to the following